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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 002183

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2029

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PROP](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: THE URUMQI RIOTS - WHAT CONTACTS SAY HAPPENED

REF: BEIJING 1955

Classified By: Acting DCM Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

Summary and Comment

¶1. (C) For three weeks following the initial July 5 violence in Urumqi, a series of EmbOffs visited Xinjiang to seek out solid information about the incident and its aftermath. Using the information gathered, we have put together a timeline of the events that began that day. Following is one of those first drafts of history that may be altered in time, but for now we are confident that we have gotten the record straight. Embassy officers, who were present in Urumqi less than 24 hours after the initial violence was reported and on the ground for two and a half weeks after the initial rioting, had access to a wide range of Xinjiang residents in Urumqi, Kashgar and Khotan. Surveillance by Chinese security services was persistent but for the most part did not prohibit EmbOffs from having conversations. Local authorities in Kashgar did order our second group of visiting Embassy officers "not to conduct interviews." Uighur residents were generally less eager to speak to Embassy officers than Han citizens were, but the number of people with whom we spoke, including numerous Uighurs, provides some confidence in our compilation of the events of July 5-7. Key observations: The violence that occurred the night of July 5, separated by a few hours from the initial, mostly peaceful Xinjiang University protest at People's Square, was overwhelmingly Uighur violence against Han. The Urumqi police response on July 5 appears to have been inadequate, allowing the rioting to flare out of control. In contrast, deployed PAP troops in Urumqi on July 7 contained the violent and deadly Han counter-riot more quickly.

¶2. (C) We continue to watch with concern the Chinese response to the riots, including what appear to be indiscriminate arrests of Uighur men, and have urged the Chinese government to be transparent and impartial in their treatment of criminal suspects. The below record will be worth reviewing as we look down the road at what surely will be continued international concern at how the Chinese "render justice" in the aftermath of this incident. End summary and comment.

The Basic Story

¶3. (SBU) On the afternoon of July 5, Xinjiang University students staged a demonstration on Urumqi's People's Square to protest the June 26 deaths of Uighur factory workers at the hands of Han Chinese cohorts in Guangdong. According to contacts, the police allowed the demonstrators to convene for a short time before dispersing the crowd and arresting some of the leaders; the police did not use lethal force at this point. At approximately 8:00 pm, hours after the People's Square demonstration had broken up, groups of Uighurs, most

of whom had not participated in the original protest, began circulating through ethnically mixed areas of the city near Erdaoqiao and apparently at random murdered dozens of Han civilians and destroyed Han-owned businesses and property. Most victims, including women and the elderly, were beaten to death.

¶4. (SBU) According to contacts, the violence surprised the Urumqi police, whose crowd control measures failed. There appeared to witnesses to have been no coordinated response to the violence until the deployment of the first PAP units at approximately 11:30 pm. The first use of firearms occurred at this time, according to witnesses who heard shots. Eyewitnesses report seeing the arrest of dozens of rioters. The Chinese government acknowledges that People's Armed Police (PAP) responding to the violence killed Uighur rioters, but EmbOffs found no eyewitnesses -- neither Uighur nor ethnic Han -- who reported witnessing the use of lethal force against Uighur rioters on July 5-6. Many Uighur contacts claimed to know of Uighur residents who had been detained during and in the wake of the July 5 incident, and one Uighur contact told EmbOffs he knew of two Uighur youths murdered during the July 7 Han-on-Uighur mob violence. EmbOffs met several Han residents who claimed to have lost family members, acquaintances or neighbors to the violence on July 5-6. PolOff personally witnessed Han residents engaged in the "counter riot" on July 7. Police and PAP deployed after the initial riots and, while clearly reluctant to use force against Han rioters, did use tear gas and physical force to ensure that no mosques were damaged.

Eyewitness Interviews

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¶5. (C) EmbOffs were present in Xinjiang continuously from July 6, the day following the outbreak of violence in Urumqi, until the late evening of July 24. During that time, officers from the Political, Economic, Consular, Regional Security and Defense Attaché sections spoke to individuals who said they were eyewitnesses or otherwise had personal knowledge of the events that occurred on July 5-7. EmbOffs spoke with Han, Uighur and third-country national residents in Urumqi, Kashgar and Khotan. In reconstructing the events of those days, we have relied heavily on the accounts of third-country, particularly American-citizen, eyewitnesses. Where a Uighur or Han interlocutor appeared particularly impartial or insightful, we have included those comments, too. This analysis does not include any official information provided by the Chinese government.

The Initial Protest

¶6. (C) In the days leading up to July 5, Uighur students connected with Xinjiang University began relatively open preparations for a demonstration on People's Square protesting the June 26 death of Uighur migrant laborers in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. Beijing-based contacts have told us that security forces had been aware of the planned protest and seemed to be preparing for it in relatively routine fashion, treating it as another instance of demonstrations and protests that occur on a daily basis in China. An American citizen teaching English in Urumqi told us that students reportedly had used websites such as Facebook to coordinate the demonstrations and circulate photos of the violence in Shaoguan. Protesters had reportedly chosen to demonstrate on July 5 because of rumors that the remains of the Uighur laborers killed in Shaoguan would be returned to Xinjiang that day. A Uighur lawyer in Urumqi told us that he had been aware of the preparations and had seen emailed photos of the Uighurs killed in Shaoguan in the days prior to July 5. The lawyer noted he had been surprised that Chinese authorities had not taken any measures to censor or block these online exchanges.

¶ 7. (C) The Uighur lawyer told EmbOffs he had witnessed the initial July 5 protest. At approximately 3:00 pm on July 5, Xinjiang University and Xinjiang Normal University students gathered at People's Square. Other eyewitnesses estimated the number of protesters in the hundreds. The protesters carried flags and signs including some that read "we are Chinese citizens." The lawyer said that demonstrators were calling on Xinjiang Province Chairman Nur Bekri to meet with them to discuss the Shaoguan incident. Several hours after the protest began, according to Urumqi residents with whom we spoke, municipal police (not People's Armed Police) dispersed the crowds. The Uighur lawyer, who could see the demonstration from his office, watched the police disperse the protesters and move them away from the square. He did not witness any violence by either police or protesters. Another Uighur contact said that after police told the students the protest was illegal and that they had to disperse, several students objected. The police used force to detain a young Uighur woman who argued with the police. This led to a scuffle as police attempted to arrest the woman but did not result in any use of lethal force by police.

Violence Breaks Out; Han Chinese Murdered

¶ 8. (C) Most contacts agreed that the violence began at approximately 8:00 pm July 5 in and around the ethnically mixed Urumqi neighborhood of Erdaoqiao. A Canadian diplomat told us that a Canadian citizen living in Urumqi had claimed to witness a group of young Uighur men moving through the Erdaoqiao area near his residence shortly after 8:00 pm. The Canadian watched as the group began throwing bricks at a passing Han motorcyclist, knocked him down and beat him, apparently to death. As the Canadian ran back to his residential compound, he saw another group of young Uighurs dragging out the Han occupants of a car and beating them with metal pipes. The following morning he learned that two Han grocers on his street had also been murdered.

¶ 9. (C) An American citizen resident of Urumqi, who said he had ventured out on a bicycle around midnight, told us he had counted sixteen Han bodies, including one older woman and a younger woman. All appeared to have been bludgeoned, and one man had been dragged out of his car and beaten to death. He said he had witnessed a group of approximately 20 young, male Uighurs cheering while carrying bricks, sticks and machetes.

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He also saw small groups of Han Chinese fleeing from the violence. Another American citizen who claimed to have observed the violence from his apartment said most of the rioters were young Uighur men in their teens and twenties. Roughly 10 percent of the Uighur rioters, he said, were women, who were pointing out Han victims and encouraging the men to attack.

¶ 10. (C) A third-country national who said he was taking shelter in a restaurant during the violence reported that he had ventured out into the streets around 11:30 pm and seen trucks bringing bloodied Han Chinese to the hospital. A young, college-educated Uighur resident in the southern Xinjiang city of Hetian (Khotan), who claimed to have heard first-hand accounts of the violence from friends who had returned from Urumqi, said that after violence had erupted as a result of the police breaking up the protest in People's Square, violence broke out, "some policemen were killed," and then "some Uighurs did bad things."

Delayed Police Response

¶ 11. (C) Our contacts almost universally agreed that the violence by roaming groups of Uighur youths had continued unopposed for some hours and that there had been no coordinated reaction by the police until late in the evening.

Witnesses generally agreed that the first gunshots had been heard several hours after the outbreak of violence. An American citizen told us that at approximately 9:30 pm she had seen a group of municipal police attempting to use sticks and ax handles to clear people from the road. Another American citizen reported first seeing armed security personnel in formations blocking vehicle traffic on several streets at 11:45 pm. Shortly after that, he said, he first heard several bursts of gunfire. The Canadian citizen reported that starting about 12:30 am (i.e., early July 6), he had heard scattered bursts of gunfire.

¶12. (C) Although a number of our contacts reported witnessing arrests of Uighur rioters, none of our eyewitnesses reported seeing the police use lethal force. An American citizen said he saw a group of approximately 80 Uighurs being loaded onto two buses by armed police at 12:30 am. During this process, a large group of Han approached the police. The American citizen saw a plainclothes police officer with a rifle and several uniformed police begin to argue with the group, which quickly dispersed after a warning shot was fired into the air. Our contacts reported last hearing gunfire around 4:00 or 5:00 am July 6.

¶13. (C) Beijing University Assistant Professor Yu Wanli told PolOff in Beijing that a friend on the Urumqi municipal police force had told him that police had been afraid to fire their weapons when the violence broke out. "Everyone knew" that shots fired would set off a full-blown riot, and the police were convinced they were not strong enough to hold off an angry crowd. They knew the army would not come to save them, so they did not fire on protesters, Yu said. Later, when the riots disintegrated into roving bands, police had used force and fired their weapons, but not until very late at night. Yu said his friend had great feelings of guilt and believed that if police had been willing to use deadly force earlier, they could have prevented many deaths, but they had been unprepared to handle the intense violence.

July 5-6 Victims Overwhelmingly Han, According to Contacts

¶14. (C) PolOffs encountered many Han residents who claimed to have lost family members July 5, including one man who said both his brothers had been killed. Longtime Embassy contact Fan Chenguang, the Han pastor of Urumqi Mingde Road Church, told PolOff that one of her Han parishioners had been killed in the violence and one injured. Chen Jieren (protect), nephew of Politburo Standing Committee member He Guoqiang and editor of a Communist Youth League website who said he had personally visited hospitals in Urumqi on July 6, told us in Beijing that the majority of victims of the violence had been Han. During almost three weeks in Xinjiang, EmbOffs encountered no eyewitnesses who reported seeing the use of lethal force by police or PAP against Uighur rioters on July

¶15. Many Uighurs knew of Uighur residents who had been detained, but none reported knowing anyone who had been killed July 5. The Uighur professional in Hetian, who described himself as a conservative, devout Muslim and gave a lengthy, animated account of injustices suffered by Uighurs at the hands of Han Chinese, made no attempt to deny Han deaths on July 5 and did not claim that large numbers of

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Uighurs had been killed in that incident.

July 7 Counter-Riots

¶15. (C) Although similarly murderous, rioting by Han residents on July 7 seemed to be smaller in scale and better contained by the authorities than the violence of July 5. PolOff was present at the start of the July 7 Urumqi riots and saw groups of dozens of Han men holding clubs moving toward the Uighur quarter. Although PAP were heavily deployed in Urumqi after July 5, the July 7 Han rioters

initially met with little resistance. The rioters inflicted significant damage to businesses on a number of streets in the Uighur quarter. However, as Han protesters moved deeper into Uighur neighborhoods they were dispersed by riot police using tear gas and noisemaking "flash-bang" explosive devices. An American citizen witness said that the July 7 rioters were mostly Han men in their thirties. A Japanese owner of an expatriate bar in a largely Han part of Urumqi said Chinese had attacked Uighur stores in his neighborhood on July 7 and that he had seen Han Chinese he knew from his neighborhood participating in the violence. PAP and Urumqi police prevented Han rioters from damaging any of the city mosques. A Uighur resident of Urumqi pointed out to EmbOffs a spot where he said two Uighur youths were killed by rioters. EmbOffs personally saw significant property damage in Uighur neighborhoods from the July 7 riots.

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